We claim:

1. A sub-genomic viral replicon comprising:

   (a) a nucleic acid construct encoding chimeric HCV nonstructural protein, and

   (b) an NS5B polymerase gene.

2. A replicon of claim 1 wherein the NS5B polymerase gene is from an HCV strain and linked in *cis* to a 3'UTR from said strain.

3. A replicon of claim 1 or 2 wherein the chimeric nonstructural proteins comprise a protein selected from the group consisting of NS3, NS4A, NS4B, NS5A, and NS5B.

4. A replicon of claim 1 or 2 comprising an NS3 nucleotide sequence that encodes the first 75 contiguous N-terminal amino acids of the NS3 of genotype 1b, of a BB7 strain.

5. A replicon of claim 1 or 2 wherein the NS3 N-terminal nucleotide sequence comprises ATGGCGCCTATTACGGCCTACTCCCAACAGACGCGAGGCCTACTTGGCTGCA TCATCACTAGCCTCACAGGCCGGGACAGGAACCAGGTCGAGGGGGAGGTCC AAGTGGTCTCCACCGCAACACAATCTTTCCTGGCGACCTGCGTCAATGGCGT GTGTTGGACTGTCTATCATGGTGCCGGCTCAAAGACCCTTGCCGGCCCAAAG GGCCCAATCACCCAAATG [SEQ ID NO:1].

6. A replicon of claim 4 wherein said NS3 N-terminal nucleotide sequence replaces the N-terminal first 225 nucleotides of an NS3 from any of six major HCV genotypes selected from the group consisting of HCV genotype 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

7. A replicon of claim 6 wherein the NS3 is from HCV genotype 1a.

8. A replicon of claim 7 wherein the HCV genotype 1a is from an H77 strain.

9. A sub-genomic viral replicon comprising:

   (a) a nucleic acid construct encoding chimeric HCV nonstructural proteins, and

   (b) at least the C-terminal end of a strain specific NS5B polymerase gene linked in *cis* to a 3'UTR sequence from said strain.

10. A replicon of claim 9 wherein the chimeric nonstructural proteins comprise a protein selected from the group consisting of NS3, NS4A, NS4B, NS5A, and NS5B.

11. A replicon of claim 9 comprising an NS3 nucleotide sequence that encodes about the first 75 contiguous N-terminal amino acids of the NS3 of genotype 1b, of a BB7 strain.

12. A replicon of claim 9 wherein the NS3 N-terminal nucleotide sequence comprises ATGGCGCCTATTACGGCCTACTCCCAACAGACGCGAGGCCTACTTGGCTGCA TCATCACTAGCCTCACAGGCCGGGACAGGAACCAGGTCGAGGGGGAGGTCC AAGTGGTCTCCACCGCAACACAATCTTTCCTGGCGACCTGCGTCAATGGCGT GTGTTGGACTGTCTATCATGGTGCCGGCTCAAAGACCCTTGCCGGCCCAAAG GGCCCAATCACCCAAATG [SEQ ID No:1].

13. A replicon of claim 11 wherein said NS3 N-terminal nucleotide sequence replaces the N-terminal first 225 nucleotides of an NS3 from any of six major HCV genotypes selected from the group consisting of HCV genotype 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

14. A replicon of claim 13 wherein the NS3 is from HCV genotype 1b.

15. A replicon of claim 14 wherein the NS3, genotype 1b, is from a J4 strain.

16. A sub-genomic viral replicon comprising SEQ ID NO:2, SEQ ID NO:6, SEQ ID NO:7, or SEQ ID NO:8.

17. A method of generating a cell comprising a replicating chimeric sub-genomic viral replicon, said method comprising introducing said chimeric replicon into a cell.

18. A cell comprising a replicating chimeric sub-genomic viral replicon.

19. The cell of claim 18 wherein the HCV sub-genomic replicon comprises all of the non-structural HCV genes and none of the structural HCV genes.

20. A method of screening for compounds that modulate viral replication comprising the steps of:

a) administering a test compound to a cell of claims 18 or 19,

and

b) determining whether said test compound modulates the replication of said chimeric replicon.

21. A method of screening for compounds that inhibit viral replication comprising the steps of

a) administering a test compound to a cell of claims 18 or 19, and

b) determining whether said test compound inhibits the replication of said chimeric sub-genomic viral replicon.